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NIO/NESA

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SUBJECT: Lebanon - Moment of Truth
Soviets in India

1. Lebanon - Moment of Truth. The first phase of the upcoming Israeli withdrawal on 18 February will be a key test of power among many of the blood feuds now raging in Lebanon and will give us some indication of how power relationships will develop there in the future.

- The Struggle for the Palestinians. Palestinian camps and settlements around Sidon will be up for grabs with the Israeli departure. Syria is determined that pro-Syrian radical Palestinians should dominate these Palestinian communities. Arafat's own forces will struggle to retain a voice. Aside from the potential danger of massacre to many hundreds of Palestinians, this struggle will be an important phase of the broader Syrian-Arafat struggle.
- Syria and Iran. The strains and differing agendas between these two states are long known, but both states have made major efforts to maintain a close working relationship of convenience. As Israel withdraws, control of the Shia in southern Lebanon will also be up for grabs. Nabih Barri's Amal organization is still struggling against radical Shia groups supported by Iran for control of the south. An atmosphere of increasing terrorism and chaos will play into the hands of the Shia radicals and will influence the position of the Shia community toward the state of Israel in the future. We cannot rule out attacks by Shia fanatics within Israel's borders if the radicals emerge supreme. Syria will not be able to control this activity. Israel likewise cannot expel the Shia--as they did the PLO earlier--because the Shia are numerous and native residents of the area.
- Syria and Israel. With Israeli withdrawal Syria will have to make further decisions about its future relationship with Israel. Will it try to restrain attacks against Israel proper--feasible with the PLO but not with the Shia? Will Syria continue to cooperate closely with Iran in the broader sense if Iran pushes Syria toward conflict with Israel? A traditional Syrian-Israeli stand-off will prove far less attainable as long as the Iranians remain in Lebanon. Yet Syria will not wish to lose this potent radical ally.

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- The Druze: The Druze will contest Christian control of the Kharrub area in the south, possibly leading to massacres. Jumblatt, who has been skilled at playing off the Syrians against the Israelis, may find his options dwindling. Will the Druze continue to serve Israeli interests? (Some claim the more cynical Israeli game plan is to permit fear of massacre to drive the Christians all to the enclave on the Israeli border, greatly increasing the Christian buffer population which will expel the Shia residents and push them north.)
- Syria will also have to decide what it wishes the future Lebanon to look like. It may support both Nabih Barri and the Iranians in order to keep the Shia divided. It will have to decide what protection if any to offer the Maronites should the Shia decide to ever move against them. Meanwhile, the Sunni Muslims are directly threatened by the Shia and the Sunni community already shows signs of increased fundamentalist influence. Tripoli--formerly a moderate mercantile Sunni--has now become a Sunni fundamentalist stronghold with an uncomfortable modus vivendi with Syria.

In short, radical forces throughout Lebanon seem to be growing and will feed upon the chaos left in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal.

2. As much of a tragedy as all of this is for Lebanon, of how much importance will it be to the world at large. The major questions facing broader western interests are whether Lebanon will end up as a breeding ground of uncontrolled radical forces who will then operate against its neighbors--Israel and Jordan--as well as spreading terror against broader western interests outside.

3. Continuing Soviet Dismay with India. Things continue to go poorly for the USSR in India.

- The recent spy scandal has involved the USSR and several East European countries. In addition, we have indications of Soviet warning to India that it cannot allow its advanced military equipment to be compromised to western intelligence. This warning may largely be designed to keep India on a tight leash at this point and worry them about the future of the Soviet arm supply.

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